


BEING A TRANSVESTITE IN THE CONTEXT OF CIS HETERONORMATIVITY: A GESTALTICAL VIEW

 <https://doi.org/10.56238/sevened2024.035-006>

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ABSTRACT

This study addresses the transvestite experience in the context of cis-heteronormativity, based on a Gestalt therapy analysis, highlighting the impact of marginalization and social invisibility experienced by this population, in addition to the social and political achievements for the inclusion of the LGBTQIA+ community.

Keywords: Transvestite. Cis-heteronormativity.

INTRODUCTION

In this study, I aim to discuss the theme of being a travesty in a cisheteronormative context from the perspective of Gestalt therapy. To this end, I conducted bibliographic research seeking to present the process of constructing the self, particularly that of the travesty, supported scientifically by the concepts of Gestalt therapy, using the concept of non-place (AUGÉ, 2012) as a potential starting point.

Speaking about this theme is a challenge for me, as a cisgender heterosexual woman, precisely because I occupy a privileged position in this cisheteronormative context where centrality is naturalized. When I look at how travesties are treated in Brazil, I realize that the privileged space I occupy generates a great unease in me, precisely because I believe that being human requires being seen and understood as human.

In my clinical practice, I work especially with adolescents, and naturally, I accompany numerous cases of people going through this moment of discovery regarding their sexuality and identity. There is a great deal of suffering surrounding each individual's experience.

When I thought about researching this theme, it was precisely to be able to offer the necessary and effective support to this population within clinical psychology. Faced with this challenge, I sought knowledge in the specific area of gender and sexuality studies, and about psychotherapy itself, I pursued the Clinical Specialization course at the Gestalt Institute of Paraná, which I concluded with this work.

Through this research, I realized that a universe unfolded not only in terms of terminology that I began to use appropriately but also in terms of connecting with my own body and how I communicate with it.

Historically, revisiting different eras and cultures, it is common to perceive the construction of an ideological ideal of control and domination in which people must differentiate themselves within only two categories: either you are a man or a woman.

The socially constructed binary is also used as a source of legitimacy for a simplistic system of vagina-woman and penis-man; in addition to a supposed existence of a gender binary (woman and man) that also becomes naturalized and constructs a social "image" of what it means to be each of these "bodies" (BENTO, 2008 apud BARBOSA; SILVA, 2017).

In this binary, all subjects who do not identify as "this or that" find themselves in a transitional space called a non-place (AUGÉ, 2012). It is also still common for families to impose silence on people who break with the "natural binary order," hiding them from social life, rejecting and expelling them from family life, marginalizing them, and perpetuating a historically exclusionary model dictated by control agencies.

In contemporary society, the State, media cultures, laws, religion, and schools, among other institutions, repeatedly perpetuate in their strategies the identity matrices taken as references and, consequently, strengthen the reproduction of differences (OLIVEIRA JÚNIOR; MAIO, 2016, p.160).

For Barros (2020), our society is based on political and religious groups, composed mostly of men, who "instituted heterosexuality as the appropriate, clean, pure, and natural sexual orientation." The author continues his reasoning by stating that it is also a prerequisite that the holder of such an orientation be a cisgender person. On this condition, he warns:

From the moment heterosexuality and cisgenderity are perceived as the norm, other sexual expressions and identities come to be considered deviant and abnormal, which allows us to speak of the existence of cis-heteronormativity (BARROS, 2020, p. 65).

From this perspective, those who do not respond to the established cisheteronormative social standard are placed on the margins, prevented from accessing and frequenting the place of prestige, subjected to social invisibility, silenced from the right to voice, accommodated in a non-place. Historically, this is the space destined for travesties in Brazil.

In Brazil, the identity category "travesty" appeared in the literature around the 1970s to designate people who were assigned male at birth but identified with the female gender. Since its appearance, media discourses pointed to a cisheteronormative discursive production of a marginal travesty subject, a term that became synonymous with a homosexual who prostitutes (VERAS and GUASCH, 2015).

For the authors, this marginality attributed to travesties was constructed by the fact that they were not recognized as people with rights within the cisheteronormative social model, a model that does not recognize them as participants in this place of prestige, relegating them to invisibility, to the streets, to the night.

The media discourse of that period associated the experiences of travesties with the practice of prostitution, linking them to murders, thefts, and the spread of AIDS. Society used its press vehicles to denounce the occupation of public spaces, demanding measures from the public authorities:

If ambiguity poses risks to the purity of the sex/gender order, once it threatens to pollute it, prostitution represents a danger to the ordering of the city, which appears in the discourses of the mainstream press as a place that needs policing and cleaning. (VERAS and GUASCH, 2015, p. 43).

According to the authors, this hygienic prejudice continued throughout the 1980s, with arrests and denial of basic health services. From the early 1990s, organized movements of travesties began to emerge in Brazil, seeking to fight for the recognition of their citizenship, such as access to basic health services and other legal rights (VERAS and GUASCH, 2015).

A milestone in this struggle process was the creation of ASTRAL (Associação de Travestis e Liberados) on May 15, 1992, in Rio de Janeiro, the first in Brazil and Latin America exclusively for travesties. In the following decade, various national meetings and congresses took place, such as on January 29, 2004, when the first institutionalized campaign against transphobia in the country was launched. Since then, the date has been known as the Day of Travesti Visibility, whose objective is to highlight the importance of diversity and respect for the organized movement of this socially and politically organized segment in Brazil.

The result of so many struggles and political organizations provided, especially in the academic environment, is the creation of some spaces where it is allowed to speak about the travesty person without the concern of it being taboo. Nevertheless, the weight of the history of being a travesty in Brazil makes it impossible to speak about this theme without being rejected in some way. This is because much of society still places them in a place of marginalization, stigmatization, pathologization, and natural exclusion, that is, socially inadequate, without a rightful place (VERAS and GUASCH, 2015).

Currently, some initiatives point to a more inclusive horizon, thanks to the struggles and achievements of the LGBTQIA+ community materialized in information, laws, and positions of organizations that are beginning to remove the subject from marginality and treat members of this community as people with rights, as can be seen in the Federal Council of Psychology (2019), the Federal Public Ministry (2017), and in SUS rights policies. Therefore, it is not just about acronyms but about a community that supports being.

PLACE AND NON-PLACE

The French anthropologist Marc Augé (2012) introduces the concept of "non-place" to refer to transitional places that do not have sufficient meaning to be defined as "a place." For the author, the place is the space where an identity is recognized, a sense of belonging, and affective ties related to experiential, historical, and cultural aspects. As a non-place, it presents the void of these references, a transitional locus through which, at times, we need to pass.

By borrowing this term for Gestalt, we can understand that the idea of place and non-place can be applied in the most diverse areas of human life, since, from birth, legal guardians, as well as society in general, lead us to perceive that there are defined symbolic places that we have to occupy, standardizing and responding to what is expected.

When a person presents behaviors in a socialized way, responding to the normativity of morals and customs, that is, fitting into the proposed binary standard, it is natural that the field (context) in which they have inserted acts in a welcoming way, positively reinforcing identity ties and belonging. However, when they are outside the norm, deviant, diverging from the historically founded models by the same field (context), they are penalized with non-inclusion, and treated as a spurious entity. In this sense, the non-place reinforces itself as a punitive and pejorative space for those who are different from the hegemonic thinking.

In this process of personal and professional construction, I have heard the term "non-place" being used in this perspective countless times, labeling people and negatively prophesying their futures. What I propose in this study goes against this reductionist thinking.

I wish to discuss this non-place from the perspective of a place of potency, a starting point, the beginning of a reflection that leads the person to search, a search that leads to the encounter, a space where connecting with the possibility of materializing, regardless of the place they are expected to occupy.

To better understand this proposition, I turn to Michel Foucault (2009), in his text "Other Spaces" and his concept of heterotopia to understand how the space occupied by the other has been forgotten by Western culture, which privileges a matrix that is European, white, male, cis-hetero, and that distances what is different.

For Foucault (2009), places carry within them a combination of signs, behaviors, and cultural traits that function as identity elements of a particular community. For the author, this hegemonic matrix seeks to maintain these factors, perpetuating this hegemony among its members, and creating a central place of prestige. Those who do not fit the precepts of this matrix are placed on the margins, prevented from frequenting these hegemonic places, yet intersected with them. This marginality is called Foucault's (2009) heterotopia of deviation.

Even with the historical achievements of rights recognition, the space destined for the LGBTQIA+ community is still one of denial and invisibility, imposed by part of the construct of hegemonic heterotopia, maintaining the centrality of the matrix, that is, defining the place of prestige.

But why do we use the perspective of this place as a reference and not that of the non-place? I understand this space as a place of potency and authenticity, which breaks with the pseudo-vulnerability instituted socially and historically, as it figures as a starting point in the search for a rightful place, where one can be seen and recognized as they are. This is where Gestalt therapy comes in.

A GESTALT VIEW

I will provide a brief history of Gestalt therapy to provide the reader with an understanding of how it can serve and provide better psychological care to travesties, facilitating an acceptance of their existential being in society. To this end, I will rely on concepts used in Gestalt therapy that are relevant, referring to some authors who are references within this theoretical approach.

Gestalt therapy is an existential approach because it is a proposal for reflection on human existence, seeking to help the person expand their awareness of themselves in the world so that they can make authentic and responsible choices and organize their life in a meaningful way for themselves. Its practice is supported by the conception of man as a being in the world in relation, in a perennial becoming, always open to fulfilling his existential project (CARDOSO, 2013).

For Freitas (2016), Gestalt therapy is a psychotherapeutic practice that is guided by an integrative view of man, seeking to see him as a whole, considering man in himself as a phenomenon, which reveals itself slowly, being seen as a complex being, which at every moment reorganizes itself according to its needs. In this perspective, the subject cannot then be completely known, with fixed and immutable characteristics, as they are part of a context, a field, in time and space, which modifies and is modified by them at every moment.

This complexity is realized, under a Gestalt view, in a presentification. According to Rodrigues (2007), Gestalt therapy uses the "here and now," work strategy focused on the present, applying a phenomenological attitude to it. Thus, every psychotherapeutic relationship will be centered on what the client brings, on what they are living at this moment, and their thoughts, sensations, feelings, and intuitions.

This present situation is the result of daily actions throughout life, problems, and difficulties. To be able to deal with these situations and the difficulties that arise each individual, according to Andrade (2014), resorts to their internal supports (self-support), developed from the relationships established with the environment and with other individuals (hetero-support).

This capacity to adapt renewedly to circumstances, as situations change, is called by Perls, Hefferline, and Goodman's (1997) creative adjustment. For Ribeiro (2006), this is the process by which the body person, using their instinctive spontaneity, finds in themselves, in the environment, or in both available solutions, sometimes apparently unclear, to self-regulate. As self-regulation, Ribeiro (2006) understands a path that the organism finds to protect itself from a greater evil, when it requires strength and skills for which it is not prepared.

The psychotherapist's role, in this perspective, is of hetero-support, walking alongside the client leading them in search of an integrative state of self-awareness and awareness. For Yontef (1998), awareness is a flow of awareness of the main event of the individual-environment field, with sensory-motor-emotional and cognitive support, it is the awareness that involves the four qualities of the individual's contact.

According to Ribeiro (2006), awareness is being aware that one is aware, not just as a cognitive act but as something integrative and transformative, a moment of encounter of the individual with the totality, also called emotional consciousness.

And about this transformation, in a proposal to walk alongside the travesty towards this state of awareness within a context of cisheteronormativity, I will present the contribution of Gestalt therapy, using the concept of non-place as a potential starting point for being, seeking conditions to offer the necessary and effective support to this population within clinical psychology.

TRANSITION: FROM PLACES TO NON-PLACES OF POTENCY

Throughout my clinical practice, I have followed the trajectory of changes from childhood to adolescence and from adolescence to adulthood. This is a period full of doubts, discoveries, and much suffering surrounding this constant process of construction, deconstruction, and identification, in a perennial transition process that is not at all comfortable.

I also accompany travesties who have gone through or are going through this transition process, reporting on their childhood experiences, naturally involving play. Reports about moments of collective activities reveal that their tastes did not fully resemble those of other male children with whom they "should identify," considering the prevailing cisheteronormative model.

By not fitting into the models presented during childhood, from the moment comparisons begin to happen, accompanied by malicious comments, until the moment they enter the process of discovering the travesty self, the child/adolescent has a long path to

travel. During this period, they face situations that generate suffering, anguish, questioning, and confrontation, especially in the family sphere.

This materializes precisely because no credit is given to what the child says about their perception of what is happening in the world around them. It is emphasized that the child is constantly connected to what happens in their field (context), being able to clearly state what they like and what they do not like. When violated in this right to speak, they are distanced by adults from this natural flow of expressing themselves.

In my listening to the parents of these children/adolescents, I hear statements like: "This cannot be happening to my child," "Where did we go wrong?" "I love my child, but I cannot accept this," "It is an aberration," "Can you help us? We need a cure." In this contact with the parents, I realize that they also need to be accompanied to be welcomed in their pain, and doubts, and also in the desire to understand what is happening to their child, the desire to help them mixed with the anguish of not knowing how.

In this context, the child questions related to their way of being and being in the world: what am I then? What space do I occupy? At this moment of questioning, all the child/adolescent needs is an external agent (hetero-support) that can provide support so that the process of identification and discovery of their essence unfolds naturally, their awareness.

This role figures in early childhood through the child's contact with family members. In a healthy and welcoming environment, this walking together that the family provides to the child gives them the conditions to feel increasingly secure and develop self-support, preparing them to continue in their natural process of development of being.

However, cisheteronormative family environments that try to fit the child into a specific gender format, usually the cisgender man, generate great suffering and anguish in the person who does not fit the presented model. In this unhealthy model, the child/adolescent usually reveals aggressive behaviors, inattention, and isolation. Parents see this as a big problem because they often do not have the conditions to look globally at the process that begins. This is one of the reasons that lead families to seek professional help from psychology.

These behaviors or symptoms presented by the child or adolescent can be understood as creative adjustments, since through the use of their instinctive spontaneity, they seek in themselves, in the environment, or both available solutions for self-regulation (RIBEIRO, 2006). As situations change, creative adjustment is given by the child/adolescent's ability to adapt to the presented circumstances, in a constant struggle to seek acceptance from the environment, the definition of their place.

However, the socially defined place as a space of acceptance imposed by cisheteronormativity as a rightful place does not allow the child/adolescent to be in existence and live their naturalness. This determined place violates the right of contact with the possibilities of existing experiences and experiences until they reach adulthood. Those who dare to break with this model are understood by society as deviant to the norm, pointed out and rejected, directed to a non-place, lonely, labeled, a space still marginal and deadly to travesties.

When the travesty is forced to live according to the system imposed by the context in which they find themselves, adapting to the social expectation regarding their biological sex, socialized, seeking self-regulation centered on social acceptance and not centered on themselves, according to Souza (2016), they may be creating a false-self and moving away from their self. But what would a false self be?

For Gestalt, the self is the way of being of the individual, how they perceive themselves. Perls, Hefferline, and Goodman (1997) understand it as "the system of contacts at any moment. As such, the self varies with the dominant organismic needs and the pressing environmental stimuli." In this sense, a false self is when the individual moves away, without realizing it, from their true self, or creates a false image of themselves, seeming to be what they are not, seeking acceptance from other people or contexts.

In this perspective, the false self figures for the place of acceptance of the norms instituted socially by the cisheteronormative model, while the self stands for the non-place, the marginal space where the potency of being exists.

Considering the historical entanglement in which travesties find themselves, relegated to a non-place imposed by cisgender heteronormativity, prevented from living their true self, Gestalt therapy is concerned with offering a relationship of care completely, as it understands each travesty as a unique being with specific demands and self-regulation.

The figure of the therapist is extremely important in this context, considering that they assume the role of hetero-support when they propose to walk alongside the client, supporting the reality of their way of being in the world, opening a path of awareness that can and should overflow the therapeutic space (SOUZA, 2016).

Even today, the violation of the right to be a travesty happens in the most diverse spaces possible, even within psychological offices. I take the liberty of sharing the report of a person I had the honor of accompanying in my clinical practice:

(...) And when the subject is disrespected outside and inside psychotherapy? Is he disrespecting himself? I went through two psychotherapists, the first was not one of the best

to give me space and courage to see myself more, to see myself TRANSversally, already in my second chance talking to myself, arranging my internal confusion, I gave the chance to come across THE psychologist, THE psychologist who saw me, heard me, and told me that it was possible, that despite the internal weight, the external weight, it was possible to be who I am, and that she would be with me! This is the true concept of psychotherapy for me, knowing that the space of psychotherapy is the space to understand my best version and leave there to put it into practice, to look at myself and welcome myself in the most diverse spaces in the world. That any TRANSITION be respected, the world in everyday life already discourages too much, ends lives, and destroys lives, LIVES. What makes CIS life better than TRANS life? (A.B, 20/07/2021)

This report increases, even more, my desire to collaborate theoretically and practically so that behaviors of violation of the right to do not happen, especially within the offices. This is not the place: it is a non-place!

In it, the objective is the construction of a psychotherapeutic relationship that strengthens other relationships, regardless of the contexts in which the person is inserted. Hence the importance of the work of the professional psychotherapist.

According to Cardella (2017), the work of the psychotherapist is to welcome suffering in the deepest of its human misery and cross together with the client so that they have the conditions to rebuild their path, under a new reference. In this sense, the psychotherapist will walk alongside the person in their essence and build a process in the face of this non-place in which they are subjected, enabling them to identify it not as a place of exclusion, but as a starting point in potency for the definition of their being in the face of this world, in the search to be able to be who they are and to experience their self in an aware way.

(...) I have no words to describe how important the psychologist's participation was in my stage, which is not over, it only evolves and everything that was and will be understood in that office, every tear shed, forms and TRANSforms me, TRANSpassing pattern and binarisms, concepts and preconceptions, TRANSforming more and more LOVE for me. (A.B, 20/07/2021)

The report of A.B. demonstrates that the psychotherapist functions in this scenario as hetero-support in walking alongside the travesty, enabling the development of self-support. Thus, they can occupy with authenticity the non-place as a place of potency, being able to trace their path, having the conditions to better deal with the most diverse situations in life being who they are, where the masculine or feminine being loses meaning in the face of the human being.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Embarking on this challenge of presenting a Gestalt view on the travesti being in a cisheteronormative context was motivated by the instigating search for more knowledge about this way of existing, within my area of clinical psychology, aiming to offer the necessary and effective support.

When I started talking to other researchers who produce on the theme, a direct question was asked me: why does a cis-hetero woman want to talk about travesties?

I confess that the search for knowledge in the specific area of gender and sexuality studies generated a great unease in me, and the question reverberated in my mind throughout the entire process of producing this text.

How did this historical construction process come about that those who do not occupy the imposed centrality can not only be killed but be killed with a refinement of cruelty in Brazil?

How can we allow dozens of travesties to be beaten, violated, and killed daily in our country? Yes, Brazil is the country that kills the most trans and travesties in the world.

I understand today that as a cis-hetero woman, I reproduced historically marked prejudiced statements and terminologies without realizing it.

My unease continues in knowing that today thousands of travesties are still prevented from expressing themselves, condemned to social invisibility and marginality, and allocated in a non-place.

The place I occupy inside and outside the office, as a citizen and as a Gestalt therapist psychologist implies that I constantly question myself about the reproduction of the norm instituted socially and take these questions wherever I go producing, in the sense of how much in me was collaborating and perpetuating this hegemonic heterotopic model.

Diving into the history of the struggle for the rights of travesties in Brazil provided a deepening in issues of diversity and respect, as well as the place they occupy in society.

It allowed me to recognize how the Foucauldian heterotopic concept, which privileges a matrix that is European, white, male, cis-hetero, and that distances what is different, was constructed in our patriarchal Brazilian society.

It helped me to identify the potentiality of the non-place as a space of resistance and recognition of being. It allowed me, under the focus of a Gestalt view, to accompany (hetero-support) each travesty who has gone through or is going through this transition process, in my clinic, identifying this imposition of the crystallized norm not only from the external environment but also from themselves, towards deeper self-knowledge (self-



support). This space of tears and anguish was often a place of supporting the pain of their awareness and celebrating each personal encounter with their self.

In contact with the research, I realized that a universe unfolded not only in terms of terminology that I began to use appropriately but also in terms of connecting with my own body and how I communicate with it.

The answer to the question raised at the beginning of this topic is very simple: because I am human! I conclude this work with a lightness and even greater responsibility for my mission, however, my reflection remains open because I am aware that I need to travel a path not only as a psychology professional but as a human being and with what it implies to be human.

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